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The Implications of Relativizing the Concepts of Autonomy and Democracy in the Politics of Democratizing Educational Management

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Abstract

The research presented here has as its main objective to investigate whether the relativization of the concepts of autonomy and democracy in official documents causes harm to the democratization process in the educational management of the country's public network, that is, whether certain interpretations can cause harm to the effective democratization of school management, as regulated by legislation. Therefore, this is a proposition that is responsible for contributing to the strengthening of the democratic regime to the extent that it seeks to investigate and identify possible setbacks resulting from the manipulation of the meanings of words and concepts to maintain a hegemonic group in power or modify the system to take advantage of public property. To this end, pragmatic discursive analysis will be used as a theoretical framework in approaching the research corpus, proposed here due to its qualitative nature, with the object of study being discourses (official education documents) and their discursive practices that arise with the implementation of laws such as No. 9,394/1996 (LDBEN), No. 13,005/2014 (PNE), Law No. 14,113/2020 (FUNDEB), etc.

***Keywords*— autonomy, democracy, democratization process, educational management, official documents.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the discursive dimension involving a certain rhetoric responsible for a dynamic that revolves around a "double process of transposition" (Gentili, 1994, p. 116), bearing in mind that "no knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation, and displacement, which is in itself a form of power, and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to other forms of power" (Foucault, 1997, p. 19). At the same time, it does not ignore that "no power, conversely, is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution, or retention of knowledge" (Foucault, 1997, p. 19). And at this level, it is necessary to admit that "there is not knowledge, on the one hand, and society, on the other, or science and the State, but the fundamental forms of 'power-knowledge'" (Foucault, 1997, p. 19). In other words, it must be borne in mind that "no process of obtaining political hegemony can dispense with a radical transformation of the meanings, categories, concepts, and discourses through which 'reality' acquires meaning and can be named" (Silva, 1996, p. 118).

It is from these initial considerations that this article seeks to address certain interpretations of the concepts of democracy and autonomy in official documents that may cause harm to the process of democratizing educational management in Brazil after the entry into force of the 1988 Federal Constitution. This work hypothesizes that the subversion of the semantic meanings of autonomy and democracy interferes with democratic processes in school management. Therefore, this is an eminently political discussion, because "educating is a political act" (cf. Freire, 1980). In other words, it is political because it

responds to a social demand that aims to contribute to a society that is, by nature, political. In this case, it must be recognized that this statement, which synthesizes the thought of one of the greatest educators of the contemporary world, is an echo of that made by Aristotle who said: "man is a political being by nature," and the political, here, is a reference to the polis (city in Greek), the place where (Western) democracy was born. However, Paulo Freire's statement also relates to what Foucault said in *The Discourse of language* (*l'ordre du discours*), when he recognized that "every education system is a political way of maintaining or modifying the appropriation of discourses, with the knowledge and power they bring with them" (Foucault, 1996, p. 45). This way Foucault uses the term politics in contemporary times reveals that there has been an update due to the complexity of the world today, whose societies are at different levels because of new demands that have arisen over time. Perhaps these demands arose at the exact moment when states began to rely, within the same political structures, on "such an astute combination of two techniques, of individualization and totalization" (Foucault, 1995, p. 236). And this work deals with one of these demands, which is linked to the process of democratization of school management.

Based on these arguments, one can ask: In what ways can the subversion of the meanings of the concepts of autonomy and democracy interfere with the democratic processes of school management? The answer to this question (problem) constitutes the central concern of this proposal, which seeks to contribute to the strengthening of the democratic regime by investigating and identifying the possible pitfalls arising from the manipulation of the meanings of words and concepts to maintain a hegemonic group in power or to modify the system to take advantage of public resources, in these times of reaffirmation of the democratic rule of law and the decolonial wave (cf. Silva, 2004).

The title of this article already summarizes well the reasons or justifications for its implementation; that is, it seeks to demonstrate the implications of relativizing the concepts of autonomy and democracy for the demo-cratization process in educational management, especially in school units. In recent years, the relativization of the interpretation of these concepts has harmed the distribution of resources aimed at managing school units, as it reduces school autonomy and distorts the under-standing of what constitutes democratic management, since the meanings of these concepts are constantly being manipulated incorrectly by legislators and those who apply the law. Therefore, this is a work proposal that addresses a social and political demand because it aims to contribute to the improvement of the democratization process in school management, to reduce the existing educational gap in Brazil, and to make socioeconomic and racial equity possible, by identifying flaws and damages that occur as a result of erroneous interpretations of the concepts of democracy and autonomy that appear in legislation.

Therefore, the overall objective established for this study is to investigate whether the relativization of the concepts of autonomy and democracy in official documents causes harm to the democratization process in the educational management of the country's public school system. In turn, its specific objectives are: a) to analyze the official documents taken as the corpus of the research using a pragmatic discourse approach (pragmatic discourse analysis) in which they are perceived as discourse; b) to contribute to the improvement of the democratization process in the educational management of the country's public school system; and finally, c) to contribute to the strengthening of the democratic regime; d) to point out the need for the elaboration of regulations that establish a definition for the concepts of autonomy and democracy.

The interest in addressing this topic is linked to issues concerning the decentralization of school management processes that occurred by force of law, that is, by the demands created by the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, which appeared with the advent of the 1988 Federal Constitution. Since then, many researchers have dedicated themselves to monitoring these processes, seeking to identify the obstacles and challenges encountered by school administrators and authorities linked to the administration of the country's education networks. Among these researchers are Heloísa Lück and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (cf. Silva, 1996, 2004; Lück, 2012). They constitute the main theoretical references used to support this research, as readings of these authors' works contributed to sparking interest in the topic presented here, insofar as questions such as: "What are the peculiarities of participatory democratic management?" (Lück, 2012, p. 15); "What are the dimensions of educational management?" appear in their works. (Lück, 2012, p.15), and an analysis of how neoliberal rhetoric has radically transformed the meaning of certain concepts in its "process of obtaining political hegemony" (Silva, 1996, p.167). In other words, it was these readings that made possible the reflections that appear in this research outline. In addition to these authors, others figure in the unfolding of the discussion, such as: Chico Alencar (2001), Pedro Demo (2013), Pablo Gentili (2001; 2009), Elie Chanem (1998), Christian Laval (2023), etc.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since this is a qualitative research study, the methodology chosen to deal with the corpus, formed by official documents (bibliographic research), is pragmatic discourse analysis, drawing on Foucault's archeo-genealogical analysis and Coracini's discursive-decons-tructive analysis (cf. Araújo, 2020). In addition to considering the corpus as discourse, as mentioned before, this analysis also focuses on the discursive practices that arise from such discourses; that is, it seeks to address the discursive effects in their political or social use, mobilizing a theoretical machinery formed by conceptual tools such as: rarefaction of the subject and discourse, historical conditions of production, utterance, discursive practice, effects of meaning, worldviews, discursive formations, political rationalities, etc. Therefore, prag-matic discourse analysis will provide the means for the description and analysis of the corpus in question. In other words, it is from the mobilization of these concepts that the research will enter its second phase, that of the interpretation and analysis of its corpus, since the first phase is intended for the selection of official documents that deal with the decentralization of education, its democratization and autonomy of educational mana-gement in Brazil, which will form the corpus of the research. In short, this is qualitative research focused on the field of education and that intends to deal with official documents that deal with the concept of democracy and autonomy in educational management in Brazil, in these 35 years of the implementation of the Federal Constitution, promulgated on October 3, 1988. Therefore, this is a work intended for educational managers who work in the country's education system, school principals, supervisors, education secretaries, teachers and the entire school community interested in the management of units and the educational system.

Here, we present only a section of the research due to space limitations. In this discussion space, we present some considerations about the data found in our analysis, which focuses on the discursive dimension, understanding that "discourses constitute annunciative dimensions of a specific type of ideology that is only comprehensible in the context of the material reality that determines it" (Gentili, 1994, p. 117). Therefore, dealing with this discursive dimension will directly lead us to the plane of material practices in which discourse must (and needs to) be unmasked or disarmed so that democratic management in public schools can be fully implemented (Gentili, 1994).

In this first section of the research, we consider as a starting point the appearance of the terms democracy and autonomy in the 1988 Federal Constitution of Brazil and in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, sanctioned on December 20, 1996, as summarized in the tables below:

The terms in the Federal Constitution of October 3, 1988 (known as the Citizen Constitution)

Autonomy
Art. 207: Garante autonomia didático-científica, administrativa e de gestão financeira e patrimonial às universidades, respeitando o princípio da indissociabilidade entre ensino, pesquisa e extensão.
Democracy
A Constituição enfatiza a gestão democrática do ensino público, especialmente no Art. 206, inciso VI, que estabelece esse princípio como um dos pilares do ensino, assim: *VI - gestão democrática do ensino público, na forma da lei;*

The terms in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education - Law No. 9.394/1996 (Darcy Ribeiro Law)

Autonomy
Art. 15: Os sistemas de ensino assegurarão às unidades escolares públicas de educação básica que os integram progressivos graus de autonomia pedagógica e administrativa e de gestão financeira, observadas as normas gerais de direito financeiro público.
Democracy
Art. 14: Lei dos respectivos Estados e Municípios e do Distrito Federal definirá as normas da gestão democrática do ensino público na educação básica, de acordo com as suas peculiaridades e conforme os seguintes princípios: *I - participação dos profissionais da educação na elaboração do projeto pedagógico da escola;* *II - participação das comunidades escolar e local em conselhos escolares ou equivalentes.* *II – participação das comunidades escolar e local em Conselhos Escolares e em Fóruns dos Conselhos Escolares ou equivalentes. (Redação dada pela Lei nº 14.644, de 2023)* *§ 1º O Conselho Escolar, órgão deliberativo, será composto do Diretor da Escola, membro nato, e de representantes das comunidades escolar e local, eleitos por seus pares nas seguintes categorias: (Incluído pela Lei nº 14.644, de 2023)* *I – professores, orientadores educacionais, supervisores e administradores escolares; (Incluído pela Lei nº*

14.644, de 2023)

II – demais servidores públicos que exerçam atividades administrativas na escola; (Incluído pela Lei nº 14.644, de 2023)

III – estudantes; (Incluído pela Lei nº 14.644, de 2023)

IV – pais ou responsáveis; (Incluído pela Lei nº 14.644, de 2023)

V – membros da comunidade local.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESUTS

The present analysis undertaken here took place in two distinct moments: one dedicated to the discursive-pragmatic description of the statements in the discourse and the other, the analysis itself; that is, first a description was made in which we sought to verify the number of times that the two terms appear in the discourse materialized in the Direct Action of Unconstitutionality (ADI) 2997, stated in the Supreme Federal Court (STF) where its ministers analyzed the constitutionality of norms of the State of Rio de Janeiro that provided for direct elections, with the participation of the school community, for the management positions of educational institutions maintained by the Public Power.

It was at this moment of the research that it was verified that the term "democracy" appeared in the "democratic management of education", as provided for in article 206, item VI, of the Federal Constitution. The Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) understood that, although democratic management is a constitutional principle, holding direct elections for leadership positions in public schools violates constitutional provisions that grant the head of the Executive Branch the power to freely appoint and dismiss those holding appointed positions.

Regarding the term "autonomy," we note that it is not directly stated in the available excerpts of the decision in ADI 2997. However, this concept is implicitly addressed in the discussion concerning the Executive Branch's power to appoint school principals, without interference from state regulations that establish direct elections for these positions.

This understanding seems to have disregarded what the 1988 Federal Constitution says about the part that deals with the democratic management of public educational establishments in the country and their autonomy, as well as what the Darcy Ribeiro Law says, which has undergone constant changes throughout its validity, leading the Supreme Federal Court to conclude that state regulations that provided for direct elections for directors of public schools are unconstitutional, as they violate the competence of the head of the Executive Branch and the constitutional principles related to the appointment of commissioned positions.

By analyzing this case, we can see how the process of democratic management in the field of education has been the target of constant attacks in discursive practices that maintain the hegemonic power of the conservative elite that benefits from the misery of the world, as demonstrated by the sociology undertaken by Pierre Bourdieu. In other words, what has been observed here is that the terms autonomy and democracy have been hijacked by the rhetoric of neoliberalism, in this new phase in which democratic regimes are attacked by an increasingly aggressive right wing that claims to be conservative of true values. Therefore, this is a process that began in the early 1980s, when democratizing demands in the field of education began to be attacked, having their lifespan shortened by neoliberal rhetoric. Now, it is entering its phase of frank expansion, with the annulment of "all those references to the necessary democratization of our education systems" (Gentili, 1994, p. 121).

IV. CONCLUSION

In conducting the analysis that gave shape to the present discussion, this study sought to diagnose the present time (cf. Foucault, 1999), revisiting the critique of neoliberal rhetoric in the field of education that appears in the works of Gentili and Silva (1994), whose focus falls on discourses dealing with total quality in education, having as historical conditions of production the period in which violent conservative reactions intensified to “overthrow the policies and movements of 'progressive' ideas” in a scenario of Cold War, oil production crisis, when certain "conditions were created for the return to a controlled democratic institutionality, a democracy of defeat or, more paradoxically, a ‘non-democratic’ democracy” (Gentili, 1994, p. 118). It was precisely in this scenario that two of the most striking post-dictatorial achievements were materialized through discursive practices: “subjective traumatization and the trans-formation of society.” (Gentili, 1994, p. 119). In this review, we attempt to highlight how the rhetoric of the total quality discourse, which took place in the 1990s here in Latin America, has been updated by incorporating the terms democracy and autonomy, transposing their meanings to maintain the hegemony of the dominant elite in power. At no point do we lose sight of the fact that "although democracy is always a political achievement of the majorities, the conditions in which concrete demo-cracies tend to establish themselves may reflect structural situations of

profound social defeat" (Gentili, 1994, p. 117).

Considering these facts and the data obtained from the analysis undertaken, the following conclusion was reached: the subversion of the meanings of the concepts of autonomy and democracy in official documents causes damage to the democratization process in the educational management of the country's public school system, because the hegemonic elite wants to remain in power through a "non-democratic" democracy, by making the democratic process in public schools unfeasible through the subversion of democratic values and ideals, necessary for the full exercise of democracy in a country like Brazil, with the strengthening of institutions that contribute to the democratic rule of law. However, it is necessary to have hope, remembering that "[...] hegemonic power in the world does not have, nor will it ever have, the last word." (Alencar; Gentili, 2001, p. 21).

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